

**Cardinal Liénart  
& the  
Intention to Do What the Church Does**

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## I

### A Doubtful Debate

It's relatively well known that the Holy Orders of many traditional Catholic priests and bishops today trace back to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. Some Catholics, however, have claimed that these orders are invalid, or doubtful, due to Abp. Lefebvre's own priestly and episcopal ordinations being conferred by Cardinal Achille Liénart. It's contended that Liénart was a Freemason, an enemy of the Church, and, therefore, he could not have had the sufficient intention required to validly confer the priestly and episcopal orders on Lefebvre; or, at the very least, his intention should be doubted. These claims and doubts arise from an underlying question: How could an enemy of the Church have the proper intention of the Church?

With a little research, one will find that all alleged evidence about Liénart being a Freemason is grounded on supposed statements of completely anonymous sources, such as the anonymous "Mr. B" that the Marquis La Franquerie used as his sole source when initiating this claim. Now, Liénart could very well have been a Freemason, despite the fact that an anonymous testimony provides us with little reason to assert this with any degree of certainty. However, in light of Catholic teaching, whether or not Liénart was a Freemason is actually irrelevant to the question of the validity of Lefebvre's orders.

Most Catholics, especially those reading this, are aware that a sacrament's validity depends on matter, form, and intention. As mentioned, *intention* has been made the object of speculation regarding Lefebvre's orders. It is very easy to misunderstand the doctrine of sacramental intention, though, and if we are going to place the validity of anyone's orders under a microscope, then we need to make sure to examine the details through the lens of the Church. With a momentary glance and an unfocussed lens, we may just notice that intention is required for a valid sacrament. We might see it mentioned in the formal decrees on the doctrine, such as those of the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent.

"All these sacraments are dispensed in three ways, namely, by things as the matter, by words as the form, and by the person of the minister conferring the sacrament with the intention of doing as the Church does; if any of these is lacking the sacrament is not fulfilled." (DZ 695)

--- Pope Eugenius IV. Council of Florence. *Exultate Deo.* 1439.

"If any one saith, that, in ministers, when they effect, and confer the sacraments, there is not required the intention at least of doing what the Church does; let him be anathema." (DZ 854)

--- Pope Paul III. Council of Trent, Sess. VII. De Sacr. can. 11. 1547.

After noticing this, however, we must nevertheless be careful not to ascribe our own definitions and beliefs to what this intention is and how it is to be applied to particular cases. We must not assume it is obvious, and then box-up the microscope. Relying on our own assumptions, we may, perhaps, conclude that Liénart's intention must be doubted. We might come to any number of conclusions if we rely on our own opinion about the meaning of intention with regard to the sacraments. But if it was through the lens of the Church that we noticed that intention is required for a valid sacrament, then through this same lens we ought to learn what this means. We may think that since no more particulars were included in these formal decrees, then nothing more could be known about the doctrine of sacramental intention. However, as stated in the third volume of *The Clifton Tracts* (published in 1865 by the Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul), both the particulars of Church teaching and mind of the Church can be known by consulting Catholic books and the writings of Catholic theologians.

"It is absurd to say you cannot know the doctrine of the Church on some particular point because she has issued no formal decree. You may know her *mind* from her popular teaching, and from the writings of her great men and doctors... Well, so is it with the doctrine of intention. The Council of Trent framed a decree about it, and subsequent Popes have issued formal decisions upon it; and if you are not satisfied with these, and want to know something more

explicit, you may go to Catholic theologians, and ask for further knowledge at their lips, or consult their writings.”  
(p.17)

--- Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul. “The Intention of the Minister Necessary, etc.” *The Clifton Tracts*, Vol.III. 1865.

Without knowing the mind of the Church, and relying on our own personal definitions and opinions, we may come to think that the issue was positively doubtful, and that the safer course would be to regard the Lefebvre line of priests as doubtfully valid. Yet prudence obliges us to focus our lens and find out if our own mind coincides with the mind of the Church. It’s never too late to dust off the microscope and take another look. In doing this, we’ll see that all doubts about this issue are truly *negative doubts*, and the opinion that the Lefebvre line should be regarded as doubtfully valid is not the safer course, but a course that contradicts the mind and teachings of the Church.

## II

### Faith and Intention

*Intention* is defined as "an act of the will, by which a man chooses a particular thing" (*A Catholic Dictionary*, p.811, 1884), but one could easily misunderstand this to mean that a person must have some degree of *faith* in order to have the *intention* required for a valid sacrament. This misunderstanding could then drive the idea that there must be some doubt about a heretic's, or other unbeliever's, intention when conferring or receiving sacraments. If this idea is applied to Cardinal Liénart, coupled with the belief that he might have been a Freemason, and therefore a heretic or unbeliever of some sort, then a person might conclude that his intention would be void due to the idea that a defect in faith causes a defect of intention. This, however, is all contrary to what the Church teaches.

To begin, there are hardly any persons more unworthy to confer sacraments than heretics, but the idea that the validity of the sacraments depends on the personal worthiness of the minister is itself a heresy.

"The proposition that the validity of the sacraments does not depend on the personal worthiness of the minister embodies an article of faith" (p.2)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments*. 1949.

Upon reflection, this only stands to reason. What chaos and doubt would befall the Church if we had to know the worthiness and mind of every minister! Indeed, the possibility that some person long ago had held to some occult sin or heresy would render all sacraments doubtful. Our Lord understood that the Church was a public institution, and wisely outlined Her doctrine regarding the sacraments so that we could receive them securely. He wants us to be confident that, where the Church recognizes a valid sacrament, we can trust that Our Lord has accomplished it.

Understanding that the unworthiness of a minister doesn't affect the validity a sacrament may correct some misconceptions about the administration of sacraments, but obviously this doesn't

fully address the confusion between the concepts of *intention* and *faith*. This confusion is not new, though, as people have mistakenly mixed these two things in the past. However, as the very learned Adrian Fortescue, D.D. points out, the two concepts are mutually exclusive.

“People who are not theologians never seem to understand how little *intention* is wanted for a sacrament (the point applies equally to minister and subject). The ‘implicit intention of doing what Christ instituted’ means so vague and small a thing that one can hardly help having it – unless one deliberately excludes it. At the time when everyone was talking about Anglican orders, numbers of Catholics confused *intention* with *faith*. Faith is not wanted. It is heresy to say that it is. (This was the error of St Cyprian and Firmilian against which Pope Stephen I 254–257 protested). A man may have utterly wrong, heretical and blasphemous views about a sacrament and yet confer or receive it quite validly.” (pp.94-95)

--- Fortescue, Adrian, D.D. *The Greek Fathers*. 1908.

There’s much that could be learned about sacramental intention just from this short passage, but the important point to be noted at this time is that *faith* and *intention* are not to be confused, as *faith* is not required for the validity of a sacrament. As stated, a sacrament can be validly conferred by a heretic, even one whose heresy concerns the very sacrament he is conferring or receiving.

History gives us actual examples of times when some have had, “utterly wrong, heretical and blasphemous views about a sacrament and yet confer or receive it quite validly” (Fortescue, p.95). In 1872, for example, the Holy Office dealt with just such a case when addressing a question posed by the Bishop of Oceana. The question was whether Baptism is valid, even when the minister expressly declares, before baptizing, that what he was about to do had no effect on the soul, and also warns those about to be baptized to not believe Baptism has any effect on the soul. The Holy Office responded, and taught in clear language, that even the expressed declaration of the minister that a sacrament produced no effects is not enough to invalidate the sacrament, since this still would not exclude the intention to do what the Church does.

"In some places, some (heretics) baptize with the proper matter and the form simultaneously applied, but they expressly warn the baptizands not to believe that baptism has any effect upon the soul; for they say that it is merely the external sign of aggregation of the sects. And so often the Catholics in their crowd turn around their belief about the effects of Baptism, and call it superstitious. Question:

1. Whether baptism administered by those heretics is doubtful on account of defect of intention to do what Christ willed, if an express declaration was made by the minister before he baptized that baptism had no effect on the soul?

2. Whether baptism so conferred is doubtful if the aforesaid declaration was not expressly made immediately before the conferring of baptism, but had often been asserted by the minister, and the same doctrine was openly preached in that sect?"

**Reply to the first question:** In the negative; because despite the error about the effects of baptism, the intention of doing what the Church does is not excluded.

**Reply to the second question:** Provided for in the answer to the first."

--- *Sacra Congregatio Sancti Officii. 18 Decem. 1872 – Vic. Ap. Oceaniae Centr. "Dubium quoad Baptisma ad mi n i stratu m ab haereticis."* *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. XXV, 1892-93, p. 246.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> English trans. by author. Original Latin text reads as follows:

*S. C. S. Officii 18 Decem. 1872 – Vic. Ap. Oceaniae Centr.*

*Dubium quoad Baptisma ad mi n i stratu m ab haereticis.*

*In quibusdam locis nonnulli (haeretici) baptizant cum materia et forma debitis simultanea applicatis, sed expresse monent baptizandos ne credant Baptismum habere ullum effectum in animam; dicunt enim ipsum esse signum mere externum aggregationis illorum sectae. Itaque illi saepe catholicos in densum vertunt circa eorum fidem de effectibus Baptismi, quam vocant quidem superstitionem. Quaeritur:*

1. *Utrum Baptismus ab illis haereticis administratus sit dubius propter defectum intentionis faciendi quod voluit Christus, si expresse declaratum fuerit a ministro, antequam baptizet, Baptismum nullum habere effectum in animam?*

2. *Utrum dubius sit Baptismus sic collatus si praedicta declaration non expresse facta fuerit immediate, antequam Baptismus conferretur, sed illa saepe pronuntiata fuerit a ministro, et illa doctrina aperte praedicetur in illa secta?*

*R. Ad 1. Negative; quia non obstante errore quoad effectus Baptismi, non excluditur intentio faciendi quod facit Ecclesia.*

*Ad 2. Provisum in primo.*

A similar case was addressed by the Holy Office in 1877, with regard to certain Methodist baptisms. As with the previous case, this too involved a question about the validity of baptisms conferred and received by those who considered baptism indifferent and unnecessary. Despite the heretical views these people held about baptism, the Holy Office confirmed that their baptisms were, indeed, valid.

"The Bishop of Nesqually had addressed to the Propaganda an inquiry concerning the validity of baptisms conferred by Methodists, against the validity of whose baptisms he alleged an insufficient and adverse intention and consequently the presumption of invalidity. The Bishop stated that the Methodists held so many errors about the necessity, the power, and the efficacy of the sacrament of Baptism that they considered it merely an indifferent rite which had been entirely omitted in the past and at a later time had been put into use again for the purpose of deceiving the faithful and attempting to show them that their false religion did not differ from the true religion. (Sacra Congregatio Sancti Officii, Jan.24, 1877--CSCP, n.1465, Vol.II, pp.99-100 sqq.)

To this question the Holy Office gave a very detailed answer which is one of the most explicit statements about the intention of doing what the Church does. In substance the reply lays down the following principles:

1. It is a dogma of faith that Baptism administered by anyone, whether a schismatic, a heretic, or even an infidel, must be considered valid, as long as in their administration those things are present by which the sacrament is perfected, namely, due matter, the prescribed form, and the person of the minister with the intention of doing what the Church does. Hence **it follows that the peculiar errors which the ministers profess either privately or publicly do not at all affect baptism or any other sacrament.**

2. The errors which the heretics profess privately or publicly are not incompatible with that intention which the ministers of the sacraments must have, namely, of doing what the Church does. Those errors in themselves cannot give rise to a general presumption against the validity of the sacraments in general and baptism in particular.

From these principles taken from the decision of the Holy Office it must be concluded that as a general rule **the baptisms of heretics are valid in spite of the fact that their ministers hold beliefs entirely incompatible with the Catholic doctrine concerning Baptism, and deny all power of regeneration in that sacrament.** Their error does not offer sufficient reason to conclude that they have an insufficient or adverse intention in regard to conferring the sacrament." (pp.28-29)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments.* 1949.

As we'll see later, the Holy Office's teaching here is based on what it precisely means to *intend to do what the Church does*. But for now, let's conclude the topic of faith and the validity of sacraments by turning to the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, whose teaching "enjoys such an elegance of phraseology, a method of statement, a truth of proposition, that those who hold it are never found swerving from the path of truth, and he who dare assail it will always be suspected of error." (Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patri*, 1879). In this particular passage from his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas explains why it is not necessary for the minister of a sacrament to have faith in order to confer a valid sacrament. In doing so, the fact is reiterated: even a faithless unbeliever, Freemason or otherwise, can confer a valid sacrament.

"As stated above (Article 5), since the minister works instrumentally in the sacraments, he acts not by his own but by Christ's power. Now just as charity belongs to a man's own power so also does faith. Wherefore, just as the validity of a sacrament does not require that the minister should have charity, and even sinners can confer sacraments, as stated above (Article 5); so neither is it necessary that he should have faith, and even an unbeliever can confer a true sacrament, provided that the other essentials be there."

--- ST III, Q. 64, Art. 9, co.

St. Thomas likewise teaches that an excommunicated minister, such as a Freemason, can confer sacraments validly.

"The power of administering the sacraments belongs to the spiritual character which is indelible, as explained above (63, 3). Consequently, if a man be suspended by the Church, or excommunicated or degraded, he does not lose the power of conferring sacraments, but the permission to use this power. Wherefore he does indeed confer the sacrament, but he sins in so doing."

--- *ST III*, Q. 64, Art. 9, ad. 3

It should be sufficiently clear that neither personal worthiness, nor faith, is necessary for the validity of a sacrament; and that heretics and other excommunicates, such as Freemasons, can confer sacraments validly, even if they hold and express utterly wrong, blasphemous, and heretical views about the sacrament they are conferring. Therefore, even if Cardinal Liénart was a Freemason, neither his personal unworthiness, his excommunication, his possible lack of faith, nor any heretical views he had about the sacraments, would have affected the validity of those sacraments conferred or received by him.

### III

## Heretics and Holy Orders

In spite of the fact that a defect of faith, or heresy, does not in itself affect the validity of sacraments in general, there might still exist the particular belief that heretics, schismatics, and other excommunicates cannot validly confer or receive orders because of their heresy, schism, or excommunication. With this belief, therefore, one might conclude that all else may have been validly conferred or received by Cardinal Liénart, except for orders. Nowhere, however, does the Catholic Church teach that heretics, schismatics, or other excommunicates are incapable of validly conferring or receiving orders. On the contrary, the Church has always taught that heresy and schism *do not* affect orders from being conferred or received validly, just as was shown with regard to sacraments in general. The teachings of the Church against the administration and reception of orders by heretics, schismatics, and excommunicates, condemn them as illicit, not as invalid. Ecclesiastical laws, such as *Cum Ex Apostolatus Officio*, affect the possession of offices and those related powers that might be received by promotions or elevations to those offices, but not the actual orders conferred by ordination and consecration. That apostates, heretics, schismatics, and other excommunicates have the capacity to validly confer and receive orders is an established teaching of the Church.

The 1917 Code of Canon Law clearly illustrates this teaching. To begin, note that there are three classes of conditions by which a person would be forbidden to be ordained – *incapacity*, *irregularity*, and *impediment*. *Incapacity* is the only one of these three general conditions that would make a person incapable of being validly ordained. Can. 968 defines that only two specific conditions are required for a person to be *capable* of receiving orders validly – 1. that they are a male, 2. that they are baptized. Even infants are capable of being validly ordained, as long as they are a baptized male.

“Can. 968... § I defines who are *capable* of receiving orders validly, and who may receive them licitly according to canon law. Two conditions are required for valid ordination, viz.:

the male sex and Baptism. The following classes of persons are therefore *incapable of being validly ordained*.

(1) Women...

(2) Incapable of validly receiving orders are also men who *are not baptized...*

Our text says *vir*, a man, which term, however, must not be pressed to the extent of assuming a full-grown man. For the ordination of *infants*, though illicit, is valid, as Benedict XIV says ("Eo quamvis," May 4. 1745. §§ 20, 28)." (pp.444.446, Can. 968)

--- Augustine, Rev. Charles P., O.S.B., D.D. *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, Vol. IV. 1921.

Therefore, as long as a heretic, schismatic, or other excommunicate is a baptized male, they are fully capable of being validly ordained. They would not have an *incapacity*, but an *irregularity*, as Can. 985 states.

"Irregularity arising from crime is incurred by: 1. Apostates from the faith, heretics, and schismatics..." (pp.485-486, Can. 985)

--- Augustine, Rev. Charles P., O.S.B., D.D. *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, Vol. IV. 1921.

In regards to *irregularity*, the canonist, Rev. Charles Augustine, explains that it only forbids one from *licitly* ordaining and being ordained. Irregularity does not prevent the *validity* of orders. Note also that the third class of conditions, *impediment*, is even less than an irregularity. As previously stated, a baptized male heretic, schismatic, or other excommunicate would simply have an *irregularity*, not an *incapacity*.

"The other class of persons mentioned in our canon are those who may receive orders validly, but *not lawfully*. They are either irregular or suffer from a canonical impediment. This is a new regulation, for thus far a distinction was made only between incapacity and irregularity. Now a strictly so-called canonical impediment is introduced, which is less than irregularity.

*Irregularity* is derived from the Latin *contra regulam...* It signifies general inhability established by law, for there is

no irregularity except it be expressed in the law (can. 983). The *effect* of this inability consists in forbidding one from being **licitly** ordained and from exercising the orders received." (p.446, Can. 968)

--- Augustine, Rev. Charles P., O.S.B., D.D. *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, Vol. IV. 1921.

Since *irregularity* only affects *licitness*, not *validity*, it is clear then that a heretic and schismatic, though having an *irregularity*, is capable of validly conferring and receiving orders.

"The ordinary minister of sacred ordination is every (validly) consecrated bishop, even though he be a schismatic or heretic" (p.412, Can.951)

--- Augustine, Rev. Charles P., O.S.B., D.D. *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, Vol. IV. 1921.

Finally, Canon 2372 clearly states, and reaffirms, that those who seek out and receive orders from a minister known to be excommunicated, suspended, or indicted, can *receive orders*, but are, simply, not *legally* allowed to exercise them until they are dispensed by their Ordinary.

"1. Those who dare to receive Orders from an excommunicated, suspended, or interdicted minister, provided he has been declared such or condemned to one of the three aforementioned penalties, or from a notorious apostate, a notorious heretic, or a notorious schismatic, *ipso facto incur suspension a divinis*, reserved to the Apostolic See.

2. Those who have been bona fide ordained by one of the above-named persons forbidden by law to administer orders, may not exercise the orders thus received, until they are dispensed. This dispensation can be given by the Ordinary to whom the ordinatus is subject." (pp.448, Can. 2372)

--- Augustine, Rev. Charles P., O.S.B., D.D. *A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law*, Vol.VIII. 1922.

Liénart would have only possibly had an *irregularity*, at most, if he were a Freemason. He would not have had an *incapacity* for orders; that is, of course, as long as he was a baptized male, about which no sane Catholic would entertain

doubts. Whether or not he was a Freemason, apostate, heretic, schismatic, or other excommunicate, there is no doubt about his capability of validly receiving and conferring orders.

These canon laws recognizing the validity of orders conferred and received by heretics and other excommunicates would certainly be dangerous, harmful, and imperfect, if it were true that heretics and other excommunicates couldn't really validly confer or receive orders. However, it should be remembered that it is impossible for the Church to establish even disciplinary laws that are inherently dangerous or harmful.

“as if the Church which is ruled by the Spirit of God could have established discipline which is not only useless and burdensome for Christian liberty to endure, but which is even dangerous and harmful and leading to superstition and materialism, – false, rash, scandalous, dangerous, offensive to pious ears, injurious to the Church and to the Spirit of God by whom it is guided, at least erroneous.” (n.78, DZ 1578)

--- Pope Pius VI. *Auctorem Fidei*. 1794.

Apart from the Code of Canon Law, the fact that heretics and other excommunicates can confer and receive orders has also been unanimously and consistently taught by many of the Church's theologians, catechisms and other authoritative books throughout history. There are too many to cite, but take, for example, the answer given by the 1821 book, *The Real Principles of Catholics*, under the question, “Can any bishop confer orders?”

“Heretics and schismatics, may validly, but not lawfully ordain; yet, by the decree of the council of Trent, no alien bishop can ordain priests without dimissory letters from the proper bishop.” (p.286)

--- Hornihold, Right Rev. Dr. *The Real Principles of Catholics*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. 1821.

The popes, of course, have also acknowledged the validity of orders conferred by non-Catholics. For instance, in 496 AD Pope St. Anastasius (496-498) taught that those ordained by a certain schismatic bishop were validly ordained. In 1595, Pope

Clement VIII (1592-1605) also confirmed the validity of ordinations conferred by schismatic bishops.

“(7) According to the most sacred custom of the Catholic Church, let the heart of your serenity acknowledge that no share in the injury from the name of Acacius should attach to any of these whom Acacius the schismatic bishop has baptized, or to any whom he has ordained priests or levites according to the canons, lest perchance the grace of the sacrament seem less powerful when conferred by an unjust [person]. . . . For if the rays of that visible sun are not stained by contact with any Pollution when they pass over the foulest places, much less is the virtue of him who made that visible [sun] fettered by any unworthiness in the minister.

(8) Therefore, then, this person has only injured himself by wickedly administering the good. For the inviolable sacrament, which was given through him, held the perfection of its virtue for others.” (DZ 169)

--- Pope St. Anastasius. *Exordium Ponificatus mei.* 496 AD.

“Those ordained by schismatic bishops, who have been otherwise duly ordained, the due form having been observed, receive, indeed, ordination, but not jurisdiction.” (DZ 1087)

--- Pope Clement VIII. *Instruction concerning the rites of the Italo-Greeks.* 1595.

As previously shown, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that faith is not required for the validity of a sacrament, and that even an unbeliever can confer a valid sacrament. He also specifically teaches that heretics and others cut off from the Church are still capable of validly ordaining.

“When a bishop who has fallen into heresy is reconciled he is not reconsecrated. Therefore he did not lose the power which he had of conferring Orders.

Further, the power to ordain is greater than the power of Orders. But the power of Orders is not forfeited on account of heresy and the like. Neither therefore is the power to ordain.

Further, as the one who baptizes exercises a merely outward ministry, so does one who ordains, while God works

inwardly. But one who is cut off from the Church by no means loses the power to baptize. Neither therefore does he lose the power to ordain."

--- *ST*, Suppl., Q. 38, Art. 2, s. c.

However, we might object that so long as the heretic is tolerated by the Church, he retains the power to ordain, but not after he's been cut-off from the Church. St. Thomas, though, says this objection is false, and shows why.

"...this is impossible, because, happen what may, no power that is given with a consecration can be taken away so long as the thing itself remains, any more than the consecration itself can be annulled, for even an altar or chrism once consecrated remains consecrated for ever. Wherefore, since the episcopal power is conferred by consecration, it must needs endure for ever, however much a man may sin or be cut off from the Church."

--- *ST*, Suppl., Q. 38, Art. 2, co.

We might, then, object that a heretic retains the power to ordain, but no one they ordained or consecrated would have the power to ordain or consecrate others. This is also false, as St. Thomas teaches.

"...this again is impossible, for if those who were ordained in the Church retain the power they received, it is clear that by exercising their power they consecrate validly, and therefore they validly confer whatever power is given with that consecration, and thus those who receive ordination or promotion from them have the same power as they."

--- *ST*, Suppl., Q. 38, Art. 2, co.

If it isn't clear yet, the teaching that heretics and other excommunicates can validly confer and receive orders is not just a doctrine that can be disregarded as speculative theology or a musing of theologians that has never had any real world application. This is not like the question of how many angels can dance on a pin-head. Even if it weren't for the fact that Catholics must assent, under pain of mortal sin, to any truth unanimously held by theologians, we would still not be able to relegate this

matter to one of mere speculation. The fact is that the Church recognizes valid orders within heretical and schismatic sects. For actual examples, a person only needs to look at the Greek Schismatics, Jansenists, and Old Catholics

"A validly consecrated bishop can validly confer all orders from the minor orders to the episcopate inclusively, though he be a heretic, schismatic, or deposed and degraded from the episcopal dignity, for he nevertheless retains the episcopal character in virtue of which he can validly ordain, provided he observes the essentials of the form of ordination and has the intention to do what the Church does in performing the sacred ordination rites. For this reason the ordinations performed by the schismatic (Orthodox) bishops of the Greek Church, by the Jansenist bishops in Holland, and by the Old Catholics in Germany and Switzerland are considered valid."

(p.558)

--- Woywod, Stanislaus, O.F.M. Ed. Smith, Callistus, O.F.M., J.C.L. *A Practical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Vol. I. 1948.

The Church has, in fact, always officially upheld and accepted the validity of ordinations in heretical and schismatic sects throughout history, even in the earliest times of the Church. Even in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Pope Stephen upheld the validity of ordinations performed by heretics. Moreover, belief that heresy or the unworthiness of the minister could prevent the validity of sacraments such as these, was actually one of the primary heresies of Donatism, a 4<sup>th</sup> century heresy that was defeated almost single-handedly by St. Augustine.

"There is no doubt, for instance, that Pope Stephen, who upheld the validity of Baptism conferred by heretics against St. Cyprian and Firmilian, upheld also the validity of Ordinations performed by these same heretics. The Council of Nicea accepted the Ordinations of the Novatians and the Meletians, and Severus of Antioch, a Monophysite, accepted those of Dyophysites, *i.e.*, the orthodox. We all know how triumphantly St. Augustine proved against the Donatists that Jesus Christ is the principle minister of the Sacraments, and that consequently neither heresy nor the unworthiness of

secondary ministers can prevent these Sacraments from existing." (p.274)

--- Tixeront, Rev. J. *Holy Orders and Ordination*. 1928.

Not only has the Church officially upheld and accepted the validity of ordinations conferred and received by heretics and schismatics, but She incorporates this doctrine into Her official procedures and practices. When those validly ordained in a heretical or schismatic sect convert, they are not reordained, even when they are approved to function as Catholic priests and bishops. This, again, has been the practice of the Church since its earliest times, as we can see from St. Thomas in his Summa, and also in the writings of St. Augustine against the Donatists.

"But such as are ordained while separated from the Church, have neither the power rightly, nor do they use it rightly. But that in both cases they have the power, is clear from what Augustine says (Contra Parmen. ii), that when they return to the unity of the Church, they are not re-ordained, but are received in their orders."

--- *ST*, III, Q. 82, Art. 7, co.

"Regarding the Sacrament of Order he [St. Augustine] says (c. Parmen. ii. 28): 'Some of them [the Donatists], overcome by the force of truth, have begun to say, that indeed baptism is not lost by separation, but that the right to administer it is lost: this is a vain distinction for both are sacraments, both are given by a certain consecration, one in baptism the other in ordination, and therefore in the Catholic Church neither can be repeated. Hence even when bishops come over, and for the good of peace are sometimes retained in their functions, they are not reordained.... but what was criminal in the separation is corrected by the union.' These passages need very little comment; it is manifest that he [St. Augustine] regarded these three sacraments as valid when administered by Donatists..." (p.405)

--- Burton, Rev. P. "Saint Augustine and the Donatists." *The Dublin Review*, vol.112, April, 1893.

This can also be seen in many other instances of early Church history.

"St. Athanasius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, and others were all supplanted by intruding bishops who administered orders; but these ordinations were recognized when the rightful bishops were re-instated." (p.503)

--- Wilhelm, D.D., Ph.D. and Scannell, Thomas B., D.D. *A Manual of Catholic Theology*, Vol. II. 1901.

Some of us may be more familiar with the schismatic Greeks, who provide a later example of this teaching and practice of the Church.

"The *schismatical Greek priests* have received their orders from validly ordained bishops. Therefore, even though they are not united to the Catholic Church they have the power to say Mass. When these schismatical priests return to the unity of the Church, they are not reordained." (p.335)

--- Morrow, Rev. Louis LaRavoire, S.T.D., Bishop of Krishnagar. *My Catholic Faith*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1954.

Other examples of this are given by Pope St. Gregory the Great (590-604) in *Quia charitati* (601 AD) and by Pope Paschal II (1099-1118) at the Council of Guastala.

"From the ancient institution of the Fathers we have learned that those who are baptized in the name of the Trinity, although amid heresy, whenever they return to the holy Church, may be recalled to the bosom of their mother the Church either with the anointing of chrism, or the imposition of hands, or with a profession of faith alone . . . , because the holy baptism, which they received among the heretics, at that time restores the power of cleansing in them when they have been united to the holy faith and the heart of the universal Church. But these heretics who are not baptized in the name of the Trinity . . . , whenever they come to the holy Church, are baptized, because whatever those placed in error received not in the name of the Trinity-was not baptism. Nor can that baptism itself, which, as has been said, had not been given in the name of the Trinity, be called repeated.

Therefore . . . without any hesitation your holiness may receive in your assembly all whoever return from the perverse error of Nestorius, **their own orders preserved for them** so that, while . . . through gentleness you **make no opposition or difficulty in regard to their own orders**, you may snatch them from the mouth of the ancient enemy."

(DZ 249)

--- Pope St. Gregory the Great. *Quia charitati*. 601 AD.

"For many years now the broad extent of the Teutonic kingdom has been separated from the unity of the Apostolic See. In this schism indeed so great a danger has arisen that and we say this with sorrow-only a few priests or Catholic clergy are found in such a broad extent of territory. Therefore, with so many sons living in this condition, the necessity of Christian peace demands that regarding this (group) the maternal womb of the Church be open. Therefore instructed by the examples and writings of our Fathers, who in different times received into their ranks the Novatians, the Donatists, and other heretics, we are receiving in the episcopal office the bishops of the above-mentioned region who have been ordained in schism, unless they are proven usurpers, simoniacs, or criminals. We decree the same concerning the clergy of any rank whom way of life together with knowledge commends." (DZ 358)

--- Pope Paschal II. *Council of Guastala*. 1106.

The heretical and schismatic Eutychians even retained valid orders and other sacraments for at least *fourteen centuries*, and, after formally disavowing their heresy, were authoritatively received into the Church with these valid orders.

"The Greek schism touched the Papacy as the continuous headship of Peter. For all or any of these bodies to unite with the Catholic Church again, required but little. If any body, like the Eutychians recently, who, after being fourteen centuries out of the Church, formally disavows, by an authoritative act, the particular heretical doctrine it has held, it comes back with its apostolic succession, valid orders, Mass and sacraments. All goes on externally as before, but they are Catholics. Even the Greek Church in Russia, Greece and

Turkey could, by a simple act recognizing the supremacy of the Pope, restore millions upon millions to the unity of faith." (p.98)

--- Shea, John Gilmary, LL.D. "Bostonian Ignorance of Catholic Doctrine." *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, Vol. XIV, Jan. to Oct, 1889.

It's evident that the opinion that sacraments cannot be validly conferred or received by heretics, or other excommunicates, is a belief that is contrary to the teachings and practices of the Church. It is, in fact, considered *proximate to the faith* that heretics can validly confer and receive all of the other sacraments (except Penance for jurisdictional reasons). Consequently, the opposite proposition (that a heretical minister cannot validly confer or receive orders) is, at a minimum, *proximate to heresy*.

"That the validity of the sacraments does not depend on the orthodox belief of the minister is a "matter of faith" at least in regard to the sacrament of Baptism... Although there is no explicit definition in regard to the other sacraments, it is regarded as *fidei proximum* that the heretics can validly administer all of them with the exception of Penance, which cannot be validly conferred by heretical and schismatic priests, except in the case of urgent necessity; but this is not on account of their lack of orthodoxy but due to the fact that they have no ecclesiastical jurisdiction." (pp.4-5)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments*. 1949.

Unless ignorance excuses, belief in a proposition that is *proximate to heresy*, such as believing heretics cannot validly ordain, is mortally sinful, and as close to heresy as you'll get without actually being a heretic. Knowing this, we must, with fear of grave sin, firmly hold the truth that heretics and other excommunicates can validly confer and receive orders. With the same degree of fear, therefore, we must firmly hold that even if Cardinal Liénart was a Freemason, it would not affect the validity of the orders he received or conferred.

## IV

### The Intention to Do What the Church Does

We've seen that *intention* is not *faith*, that faith is not required for valid sacraments, that heretics can validly ordain, and that a man may even "have utterly wrong, heretical and blasphemous views about a sacrament and yet confer or receive it quite validly" (Fortescue, p.95). A closer look at sacramental intention makes it easier to see why this is the case, and why even a person who believes that a certain sacrament is an unnecessary, inefficacious, and indifferent rite can still confer and receive that sacrament validly.

To begin properly understanding sacramental intention, let's again, "Go to Thomas and ask him to give [us] from his ample store the food of substantial doctrine wherewith to nourish [our] souls unto eternal life," as Pope Pius XI teaches us to do in his 1923 encyclical, *Studiorum Ducem*. In doing so, we will see that St Thomas Aquinas reaffirms what has been shown thus far, and also provides us with a deeper understanding about the intention necessary for valid sacraments.

First, we see that St. Thomas teaches that the intention of the minister is, indeed, required in confecting a valid sacrament, as the sacramental operation would not be valid if it just happened to be performed by chance. We then see from his teaching that this intention is expressed by the words pronounced in a sacrament.

"What is unintentional happens by chance. But this cannot be said of the sacramental operation. Therefore the sacraments require the intention of the minister."

--- *ST* III, Q. 64, Art. 8, s. c.

"And this intention is expressed by the words which are pronounced in the sacraments; for instance the words, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father," etc."

--- *ST* III, Q. 64, Art. 8, co.

Now, one might assert that because the general intention of Freemasonry is contrary to that of the Church, then a Freemason could not have the proper intention required to validly confer a sacrament; and, consequently, any sacrament conferred by a

Freemason must be regarded as invalid, or doubtfully valid at best. Similarly, it might be asserted that if Cardinal Liénart was a Freemason, then his membership would be, in itself, an expression of a contrary intention, or his Freemasonic membership would mean that he has expressed certain things in becoming a member that would be equivalent to expressing a contrary intention; and, therefore, he would have had a defective intention when conferring orders on Lefebvre. These assertions, though, would derive from another misunderstanding about the intention required in conferring sacraments. It is the misconceived notion that if the minister or recipient of a sacrament has any kind of perverted intention in regard to the Church, or the sacrament they are conferring, then they would have an intention that is not that of the Church's, and the result would be an invalid sacrament. Here, the word intention is being ascribed the broadest definition, such as how it might be commonly used in society today. But the intention required in the sacraments, as defined by the Church and Her theologians, is not a broad intention at all, but a very specific type of intention. St. Thomas directly addresses this common misconception about sacramental intention, showing that there are two types of intention in regard to the sacrament. One of these types of intention may be perverted without affecting the validity of the sacrament.

“The minister's intention may be perverted in two ways. First in regard to the sacrament: for instance, when a man does not intend to confer a sacrament, but to make a mockery of it. Such a perverse intention takes away the truth of the sacrament, especially if it be manifested outwardly.

Secondly, the minister's intention may be perverted as to something that follows the sacrament: for instance, a priest may intend to baptize a woman so as to be able to abuse her; or to consecrate the Body of Christ, so as to use it for sorcery. And because that which comes first does not depend on that which follows, consequently such a perverse intention does not annul the sacrament; but the minister himself sins grievously in having such an intention.”

--- *ST* III, Q. 64, Art. 10, co.

As those familiar with the Summa Theologica know, St. Thomas always includes objections to his teachings, and then provides the responses to these objections. He also does this for his teachings on sacramental intention, and his replies offer us more details about the two types of intention, along with more explanations of the general doctrine of sacramental intention. Moreover, these responses of the Angelic Doctor address some of the misconceived notions we might have about the intention required in the sacraments.

The first hypothetical objection states: “It seems that the validity of a sacrament requires a good intention in the minister. For the minister's intention should be in conformity with the Church's intention, as explained above (8, ad 1). But the intention of the Church is always good. Therefore the validity of a sacrament requires of necessity a good intention in the minister” (*ST III*, Q. 64, Art. 10, arg.1). To this first objection, St. Thomas responds as such:

“The Church has a good intention both as to the validity of the sacrament and as to the use thereof: but it is the former intention that perfects the sacrament, while the latter conduces to the meritorious effect. Consequently, the minister who conforms his intention to the Church as to the former rectitude, but not as to the latter, perfects the sacrament indeed, but gains no merit for himself.”

--- *ST III*, Q. 64, Art. 10, ad. 1.

The second hypothetical objection states: “Further, a perverse intention seems worse than a playful one. But a playful intention destroys a sacrament: for instance, if someone were to baptize anybody not seriously but in fun. Much more, therefore, does a perverse intention destroy a sacrament: for instance, if somebody were to baptize a man in order to kill him afterwards” (*ST III*, Q. 64, Art. 10, arg. 2). To this second objection, St. Thomas responds as such:

“The intention of mimicry or fun excludes the first kind of right intention, necessary for the validity of a sacrament. Consequently, there is no comparison.”

--- *ST III*, Q. 64, Art. 10, ad. 2.

The third hypothetical objection states, "Further, a perverse intention vitiates the whole work, according to Luke 11:34: "If thy eye be evil, thy" whole "body will be darksome." But the sacraments of Christ cannot be contaminated by evil men; as Augustine says against Petilian (Cont. Litt. Petil ii). Therefore it seems that, if the minister's intention is perverse, the sacrament is invalid" (ST III, Q. 64, Art. 10, arg. 3). To this third objection, St. Thomas responds as such:

"A perverse intention perverts the action of the one who has such an intention, not the action of another. Consequently, the perverse intention of the minister perverts the sacrament in so far as it is his action: not in so far as it is the action of Christ, Whose minister he is. It is just as if the servant (*minister*) of some man were to carry alms to the poor with a wicked intention, whereas his master had commanded him with a good intention to do so."

--- ST III, Q. 64, Art. 10, ad. 3.

From these teachings of St. Thomas it is evident that a man may have many wicked intentions in conferring a sacrament, but as long as he is simply intending to *do* what the Church *does*, then the sacrament is valid. This point is clarified by St. Thomas in his explanation on why the lack of faith does not mean the lack of intention.

"But if his faith be defective in regard to the very sacrament that he confers, although he believe that no inward effect is caused by the thing done outwardly, yet he does know that the Catholic Church intends to confer a sacrament by that which is outwardly done. Wherefore, his unbelief notwithstanding, he can intend to do what the Church does, albeit he esteem it to be nothing. And such an intention suffices for a sacrament: because as stated above (A. 8, ad 2) the minister of a sacrament acts in the person of the Church by whose faith any defect in the minister's faith is made good."

--- ST III, Q. 64, Art. 9, ad. 1.

Remember that the councils of the Church, such as the Council of Trent, have taught that in performing the sacraments

there must be “the intention at least of doing what the Church does.” (Council of Trent, Sess. VII. *De Sacr. can. 11.* 1547). Notice how this corresponds to the exact wording of St. Thomas’s teaching, when he says, “Wherefore, his unbelief notwithstanding, he can **intend to do what the Church does**, albeit he esteem it to be nothing.”

Just previously, St. Thomas explained the fundamental reason why the minister may have a perverse intention, or no belief in the sacrament at all, yet still confer it validly. The reason, as he taught, is that Christ is the true Minister of all the sacraments, and human ministers are simply carrying out an action of Christ. Since Christ is ultimately the true Minister of every sacrament, the person performing a sacrament only needs to have a general intention of doing what the Church does. With that intention, the sacrament will be valid despite their disbelief or heresy regarding the sacrament. Here we see more authorized Catholic theological manuals which also explain this teaching of the Church.

“It is not required that he should believe in the Sacrament or in the Church herself – a general intention of doing what Catholics, or Christians, do is sufficient. This is because the true Minister of all the Sacraments is Jesus Christ Himself, the men who administer them being only His deputies and instruments. As St. Augustine says, whether it be Peter or Paul or Judas who administers Baptism, it is equally Christ who baptizes.” (p.166)

--- Gerard, Rev. John, S.J. *A Course of Religious Instruction for Catholic Youth.* 1901.

“Though he is an instrument in Christ’s hands, he is not simply a tool; he is a living instrument, and therefore the action of his will must come in. Moreover, he must at least have the “intention of doing what the Church does” (*faciendi quod facit Ecclesia*; Council of Trent, sess. VII, *De Sacr. In gen., can. 11*). What, however, is the precise import of this formula is a matter of discussion among theologians. All agree that the minister need not have the specific intention of doing what the Roman Catholic Church does; that he need not intend to produce the effect of the sacrament; and that he need not even believe that the rite is a sacrament at all, or know what a sacrament is. They agree, too, that he must

intend to perform a ceremony which is held as sacred and religious by the Church of Christ." (p.370)

--- Wilhelm, D.D., Ph.D. and Scannell, Thomas B., D.D. *A Manual of Catholic Theology*, Vol. II. 1901.

By now, the doctrine of sacramental intention should be much clearer. The source of much confusion in this matter ultimately lies in the notion that one performing a sacrament must, for validity, intend what the Church *intends*. However, for validity, it is not necessary that the intention be what the Church *intends*, but only that there is an intention to do "what the Church *does*." This should be clear from St. Thomas's previous teaching, but is also well stated by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph Pohle, Ph.D., D.D.

"The *Decretum pro Annenis* defines that the intention to do what the Church does is a necessary requisite for the valid administration of a Sacrament. The Tridentine Council solemnly declares: "If anyone saith that in ministers, when they effect and confer the Sacraments, there is not required the intention at least of doing what the Church does, let him be anathema." To understand the full significance of this declaration it should be noted that the Council does not say, "what the Church *intends*" but merely, "what the Church *does*." Consequently, all that is necessary for the valid administration of the Sacraments is the direct intention, *i. e.* the purpose of performing the rite as is usual among Catholics. To demand in addition a reflex intention, either for the administration of the Sacrament as such, or for the production of the sacramental character and the infusion of grace, would be to make the validity of the Sacrament depend upon the orthodoxy of the minister, - an assumption which we have shown to be false." (p.178)

--- Pohle, Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph, Ph.D., D.D. *The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise*, Vol. I. 1915.

Again, we see it reiterated that there are two types of intention a minister could have in confecting the sacraments – *direct* and *reflexive*. The *direct intention* affects the validity of the sacrament. It is simply the will of actually doing what the Church *does*, which is the will to perform the "rite as is usual among

Catholics.” The *reflex intention* does not affect the validity of the sacrament. It is essentially the will to do what the Church *intends*, which is to will “the production of the sacramental character and the infusion of grace.” So, a sacrament would be valid even if a minister intended to do what the Church *does* (perform the rite) yet did not intend what the Church *intends* (the production of the sacramental character and infusion of grace, etc.) This means that the intention does not have to even include the *ultimate* or *proximate end* of the sacrament.

"It is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament that the minister wish the ultimate end of the sacrament, that is, eternal life for the recipient, or even the proximate end, e.g., in Baptism, to make one a member of the Church, or to confer grace. If this were necessary, the heretic who ignores the Church, and the pagan who knows nothing about the Church, would never be able to baptize validly." (p.26)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments.* 1949.

It's clear that Liénart's intention would have been sufficient for validity as long as he simply intended to do what the Church does, which would only mean intending to perform the rites of ordination on Lefebvre. All of the other possible wicked intentions that we might possibly ascribe to Liénart would have been intentions that had no affect on validity. As the Church teaches, even an *implicit* intention of doing what the Church *does* is a sufficient intention for a valid sacrament.

"The intention is sufficient also if the minister intends to do something which is equivalent to that which the Church does, that is, if he intends to do that which Christ instituted, or what is commanded in the Gospel, or what he sees others do. This latter indication of the proper intention makes it understandable how a Jew or a pagan could have a sufficient intention. In a case of necessity a catechumen might call a pagan and ask him to pour water on his forehead and pronounce the words of Baptism according to the intention of the recipient. In fulfilling the request the pagan would have

at least the implicit intention of doing what the Church does, and the Baptism would be valid." (p.26)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments*. 1949.

"With respect to the object of the intention, it must be "to do what the Church does," and the intention may be directed to this object in two ways: *explicitly* and *implicitly*. A well-instructed, pious Catholic, in baptizing an infant, would have the *explicit* intention of "doing what the Church does," while a heretic or an infidel, not believing in the true Church or in the efficacy of the Sacraments, but yet intending in the act of baptizing to do what is done amongst Christians, would have the *implicit* intention of "doing what the Church does," and such implicit intention suffices for the validity of the Sacrament." (p.47.)

--- O'Kane, Rev. James. *Notes on the Rubrics of the Roman Ritual: Regarding the Sacraments in General*. 1883.

Lastly, it should be remembered, as the learned Adrian Fortescue, D.D. previously pointed out, that unless it's deliberately excluded, this implicit intention to do what the Church does is something that one performing the sacrament could hardly help having.

"The 'implicit intention of doing what Christ instituted' means so vague and small a thing that one can hardly help having it — unless one deliberately excludes it." (p.94)

--- Fortescue, Adrian, D.D.. *The Greek Fathers*. 1908.

## V

**Presumption of Intention and Validity**

The Church is clear about just how little intention is required for a valid sacrament. All that is required is simply an implicit intention to do what the Church does, and this intention is expressed in the form of the sacrament. Because of this, one can hardly help having the intention when performing a sacrament. It is possible, however, for a sacrament to be invalid because one *deliberately excludes* the intention of doing what the Church does. This could only be known if the minister were to state in some way that he deliberately excluded the intention to perform that sacrament. Unless a minister expressly states that for a particular sacrament, or number of sacraments, he intended to *not* do what the Church does, then the Church presumes that the minister intended what he did.

*“Defect of intention must be very rare, with the sole exception of marriage, in which diverse motives may operate to cause defect of real will. There is always an abstract possibility that a man or woman may merely simulate marriage consent. In spite of this, people do not generally worry about the validity of their marriages; the presumption is always that the internal mind corresponds to the words spoken. So it is, likewise, **with all the sacraments; the presumption always is that the minister intends what he does.**”* (pp.491-492, no.567)

--- Leeming, Bernard, S.J. *Principles of Sacramental Theology*. 1956.

Similarly, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that unless the minister externally expresses that he did not intend to do what the Church does when he was performing a sacrament, then the intention expressed in the words he uttered in the sacrament suffices for the Church to presume validity.

**“The minister of the sacrament acts in the person of the whole Church, whose minister he is, and in the words which he utters the intention of the Church is expressed. This intention suffices for the perfection of the sacrament unless**

**the contrary is externally expressed** on the part of the minister or the recipient of the sacrament."

--- *ST III, Q. 64, Art. 8, ad. 2.*

Consequently, as long as the matter and form are correct, the Church does not, as a rule, doubt the intention of the minister. No Catholic should doubt what the Church does not doubt.

**"As a general rule there is no doubt about the intention of the minister of the sacraments provided the matter and the form are correctly posited.** It is taken for granted that the minister has the intention of doing what the Church does."

(p.ix)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments.* 1949.

"When the fact of ordination is duly established, the *validity* of the orders conferred is naturally *to be presumed.*" (p.72)

--- Doheny, Rev. William. *Canonical Procedure in Matrimonial Cases.* Vol.II. 1942.

"The Church does not judge about the mind or intention in so far as it is something by its nature internal; but, in so far as it is manifested externally, she is bound to judge concerning it. When any one has rightly and seriously made use of the due form and the matter requisite for effecting or conferring the sacrament, he is considered by the very fact to do what the Church does. On this principle rests the doctrine that a sacrament is truly conferred by the ministry of one who is a heretic or unbaptized, provided the Catholic rite be employed. On the other hand, if the rite be changed with the manifest intention of introducing another rite not approved by the Church and of rejecting what the Church does, and what by the institution of Christ belongs to the nature of the sacrament, then it is clear that not only is the necessary intention wanting to the sacrament, but that the intention is adverse to and destructive of the sacrament."

--- Popo Leo XIII, *Apostolicae Curae.* 1896.

"The Catholic doctrine of Sacramental intention is thus laid down by Pope Leo XIII., in his Bull *Apostolicae Curae*, concerning Anglican Orders... Upon this statement of doctrine His Holiness based the argument that as the first Anglicans openly and professedly repudiated the notion of a sacrificial priesthood, and declared that they would have none of it, and drew up an ordination rite different from that of the Church to suit their own purposes, they plainly manifested their intention of *not* doing what the Catholic Church does." (pp.166-167)

--- Gerard, Rev. John, S.J. *A Course of Religious Instruction for Catholic Youth*. 1901.

"Therefore the Church holds, and till the contrary is proved wishes all to hold, that such due intention is never absent whensoever the minister seriously goes through the sacramental rite she has prescribed, using the matter and form which she uses." (p.105)

--- Brandi, Rev. S. M., S.J. and Smith, Sydney F., S.J. *A Last Word on Anglican Ordinations*. 1897.

In brief, Catholic doctrine on sacramental intention requires only that the individual be performing the sacrament. A heretical and sinful bishop, lazily executing an ordination with a wandering mind, who even thinks the holy orders are a silly, antiquated tradition, would still be performing a true ordination. Once more, Christ has wisely ordained this, because his actions are not for the good of himself or even of the ordained, but for the good of the Church as a whole. When one is not truly ordained, some outward sign is given by which this is known (for instance, if the "ordination" were merely part of a play, and therefore clearly not intended, or if the bishop stated beforehand it was only a practice run), and accepting this falls upon the providence of God. Any other doctrine would lead to disaster and ruin. He would not allow His Church to become a farce on account of the ill-will of some few within Her. No, we can trust that Our Lord preserves Her sacraments and validly confers them so long as Her ministers follow the matter and form He prescribed.

As Catholics, we must uphold and follow these Catholic principles and teachings. In doing so, we must presume that Cardinal Liénart had at least the *implicit intention to do what the*

*Church does* with regard Abp. Lefebvre orders. There is no evidence of Liénart stating that he did not intend to do what the Church does when he conferred orders on Lefebvre. To presume that he internally may not have intended *to do what the Church does*, despite his words and actions in conferring these orders, would be to oppose Catholic principles and teachings. It should not need to be said that knowingly opposing Catholic principles, thereby placing oneself in opposition against the Church, certainly has grave moral consequences on our soul.

Now, simply being able to postulate reasons that a person might have had for withholding their intention while performing a sacrament is not enough to diminish the presumption that they intended to do what the Church does. The intention, and validity of the sacrament, is to be presumed until it is *proved* that the minister withheld their intention to do what the Church does. This has always been Catholic teaching and practice, even in regards to ordinations, as is clearly shown by this teaching of the Holy Office of 1931.

“§ 1. Sacred ordination is presumed to have been validly received, unless the contrary is proven.

§ 2. In order to truly declare the nullity of sacred orders in the case in question, it is required to prove the lack of intention to have been present.” (no.62, p.470)

--- *Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Annus XXIII – Vol. XXIII, 5 Decembris 1931, Sacra Congregatio De Sacramentis, Caput XIII, De indiciis et praesumptionibus.* 1931.<sup>2</sup>

We can see that ordinations are to be presumed valid, even in the face of all possible speculations about the minister’s intention; unless it’s *proved* that there was a lack of the intention to do what the Church does. The only way to prove this, as was previously shown, is to prove that the minister expressly stated his intention to *not* do what the Church does in performing any particular sacrament, or number of sacraments. It is easy, then, to understand why this validity is called the “queen of presumptions.”

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<sup>2</sup> English trans. by author. Original Latin text reads as follows:

§ 1. *Sacra ordinatio praesumitur valide recepta, nisi contrarium probetur.*

§ 2. *Ad declarandam vero nullitatem sacrorum ordinum in casu de quo agitur, requiritur ut defectum intentionis adfuisse probetur.*

"When it is shown that an act or contract has actually been entered upon, there is a general presumption of law, known as the queen of presumptions, which holds the act or contract as valid, until invalidity is proved." (n.408)  
 --- Wanenmacher, Francis, J.C.D. *Canonical Evidence in Marriage Cases*. 1935.

We might object, however, that we can't be *absolutely certain* that Liénart didn't deliberately withhold his intention to do what the Church does, and, therefore, there is no absolute certainty that Lefebvre's orders are valid. This, though, is true in regard to every minister and every sacrament. As Rev. De Salvo states, no one can have *absolute certainty* that any particular sacrament is valid.

"It's true that without a special revelation no one can have absolute certainty that he has received a sacrament or that he is in the state of grace, but his assurance on this subject may approach so nearly to this absolute certainty as to make any misgiving on the part of the recipient foolish and vain." (p.x)  
 --- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments*. 1949.

Though we cannot have *absolute certainty* about the validity of any particular sacrament, we can be *sufficiently certain*, as Cardinal Billot states.

"...whenever there is no appearance of simulation on the part of the minister, the validity of the sacrament is sufficiently certain." (p.201)

--- Billot, Cardinal Louis, S.J. *De Ecclesiae Sacramentis. Commentarius in Tertiam Partem S. Thomae*. Vol.1, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. 1914.

Apart from special revelation, we can never have *absolute certainty* about the validity of a sacrament, but when it is performed with the proper matter and form, and with no appearance of simulation, we have *moral certainty* of its validity. This *moral certainty* is what Cardinal Billot previously described as being "sufficiently certain." *Moral certainty* is not the *certainty*

*of faith*, for we cannot have the *certainty of faith* that any particular sacrament is valid; but *moral certainty* is all we need.

"It is true that we cannot be certain *with the certainty of faith*, — that is, with the certainty with which we believe the being of God or the articles of the creed, — that this or that priest has been validly ordained, or this or that Sacrament has been validly administered; but we *are* certain, with the certainty of faith, that priests and Sacraments are Christ's institution; and moreover we may be *morally* certain that in any indefinite number of instances there was an intention to do what the Church does; and these two certainties are enough for all practical purposes." (p.28)

--- Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul. "The Intention of the Minister Necessary, etc." *The Clifton Tracts*, Vol.III. 1865.

This *moral certainty*, therefore, is sufficient for acting prudently and without anxieties.

"Concerning the validity of the sacraments one can have moral certitude, which suffices for acting prudently, and for dispelling anxieties of spirit. Thus Leo XIII: "When someone seriously and according to the ritual adheres to the due matter and form for confecting and conferring a sacrament, from this fact [considered according to the common manner in which men act] it may be inferred that he undoubtedly intends (with an internal intention) to do what the Church does." [Apostolicae Curae]" (n.479, rep. to obj. 2)

--- Hervé, Msgr. Jean Marie. *Manuale Theologiae Domaticeae*, Vol. III. 1929.

Though at this point we might well understand that we ought to presume a minister or recipient of a particular sacrament had at least the *implicit intention to do what the Church does*, it's possible that we may still feel anxiety arising from lingering negative doubts about the unknown possibility that a minister, such as Cardinal Liénart, deliberately withheld their intention. However, to calm these anxieties, we ought to remember that even if this were the case, we would still receive graces by approaching those sacraments in good faith according to the principles and

teachings of the Church, such as those presented throughout this paper.

"It must be remembered that God, who has bound Himself to give grace when the sacraments are duly received, has nowhere limited His power to give grace apart from these rites. One, therefore, who acts in good faith may have prudent assurance that no disaster will befall him through the deceit of the wicked minister." (p.x)

--- De Salvo, Rev. Raphael, O.S.B., S.T.L. *The Dogmatic Theology on the Intention of the Minister in the Confection of the Sacraments.* 1949.

"What the Catholic Church teaches is, that there is no *Sacrament* without intention; she is not so foolish or so impious as to teach that there is no grace without Sacraments, much less does she say that another's intention is necessary for our salvation. On the contrary, she would have us be sure that God, who is love, will rather work a miracle than suffer a man of good will to be really a loser by an act of volition in another without fault of his own." (p.29)

--- Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul. "The Intention of the Minister Necessary, etc." *The Clifton Tracts*, Vol.III. 1865.

## VI Conclusion

Doubts about Cardinal Liénart's intention in the ecclesiastical and sacramental acts he performed should no longer be entertained in the Catholic mind. We must presume that he intended to do what the Church does when he *did* what the Church does. We *must*, as Catholics, presume that these acts were valid. To entertain doubts or presume anything else would be to *oppose* Catholic teaching. This would, objectively, be a grave sin. We can be morally and sufficiently certain of the validity of Archbishop Lefebvre's orders, and, again, we are obliged, as Catholics, to presume these orders to be *as valid as any others*. *Nothing* has been proven in any way that Liénart withheld his intention to "do what the Church does" when receiving orders or conferring orders on Lefebvre; and this would have to be proven before a Catholic could do anything other than presume validity. Not only has it not been proven, but there has been absolutely *no evidence* to indicate that Liénart was not intending "to do what the Church does". Even if it were certain that he was a Freemason, this would not be evidence that he withheld his intention to "do what the Church does" when he *did* what the Church does. It would, at most, be evidence that he may not have intended what the Church *intends*, but as was shown, this type of intention is not required for validity.

If any feelings or thoughts of doubt should ever arise within us over these issues, we ought to turn our mind towards the *mind of the Church* and her teachings, knowing that in light of these teachings these particular doubts about Liénart's intention are simply *negative doubts*, which we are morally obliged to avoid. By following the teachings of the Church, we act in good faith, and, as previously stated by Rev. De Salvo, "One, therefore, who acts in good faith may have prudent assurance that no disaster will befall him through the deceit of the wicked minister." (De Salvo, p.x) Lastly, there doesn't seem to be more fitting and memorable words to help resolve these doubts, and reaffirm what has been previously stated, than the following teaching from the Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul's *Clifton Tracts*.

"But to come to what the Church herself has declared; for Protestants have very wild notions on the subject, and fancy that a great deal more is meant by "intention" than is meant. All that she positively requires is, that the person who administers a Sacrament should "intend to do what the Church does;" and by these words is not meant that the person should intend immediately to do what the Catholic Church, or, as Protestants would say, the Roman Church does; on the contrary, if he intend immediately to do what some Protestant sect does, the Sacrament is valid, if only as a matter of fact that sect does what the Catholic Church does. This being so, it is plain that it is not necessary to intend to confer any grace, or produce any spiritual effect, by means of a Sacrament, or even to know the nature of the rite; it is sufficient to intend to do that particular act which the Church does. Neither faith nor knowledge are required; nay, a man may actively disbelieve and deride the doctrine of the Church, and openly protest against and abjure any sacramental efficacy in the act that he does, and even deny that it has any sacredness in it, and yet he will perform a valid Sacrament if only he intend to do that religious act which the Church does. Hence we see the irrelevance of all objections grounded on the feet that there have been at times priests in the Church who were secretly infidels; their infidelity could not invalidate their priestly acts, if only they intended to do what the Church does. And, by the way, I may observe, that an infidel is a most unlikely person to withhold his intention: he does not believe that Sacraments are any thing *with* intention; why, then, should he withhold it? Any how, personal belief or non-belief has nothing to do with the matter. It is what the Church *does*, not what she *intends*, that must be intended by the minister of a Sacrament." (pp.13-14)

--- Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul. "The Intention of the Minister Necessary, etc." *The Clifton Tracts*, Vol.III. 1865.

## Appendix A

### The Deathbed Confession

It's been claimed that Cardinal Liénart made a deathbed confession and that the words of that supposed deathbed confession would constitute additional evidence, and perhaps another argument, against his intention in conferring orders on Abp. Lefebvre. Some have said that Liénart confessed to being a Freemason on his deathbed, and then released his confessor from the seal of the confessional, requesting him to make this confession known to the public. Others go further and say he confessed to trying to destroy the Church. And while some quote Liénart as supposedly saying, "humanly speaking, the Church is dead," whatever else he supposedly said is never actually quoted, only paraphrased. This story of a supposed deathbed confession has been repeated overtime by various people, generally in varying contexts. For instance, some tell the story of a prideful, gloating, Liénart confessing these things in a victorious manner. Others tell the story of a sorrowful and remorseful Liénart attempting to make amends at the end of his life. Yet, the supposed first-hand source for any version of this story remains nameless and unidentifiable.

Despite the fact that the words and story of an anonymous source would have no standing in an ecclesiastical court, some people still let it stand as evidence in their minds. However, just as Liénart's supposed Freemasonic, or Luciferian, history, if verified, would tell us nothing about whether he deliberately held a positive intention to not do what the Church *does* when he *did* what the Church *does*; the same holds true about the worst he is supposed to have said on his deathbed. All of what he is said to have confessed has nothing to do with whether or not he intended to do what the Church *does* in any of the sacramental acts he was involved in. Whether quoted or paraphrased, the words of his supposed confession say nothing at all about any sacraments he performed.

Liénart's supposed confession would, at most, show that he did not intend what the Church *intends*, which makes no difference to the validity of the sacrament. Proof that anyone internally intended not to do what the Church does when performing any sacrament, or any group of sacraments, would have to come in the

form of their own words *expressing just that*. In the case of someone performing the rites externally as a Catholic, this would require some artifact showing the expressed words of the person saying that he did not intend to *do* what the Church *does* for a particular sacrament, or group of sacraments. Evidence that someone confessed to trying to destroy the Church would only show, at most, that they did not intend what the Church *intends*, but it in no way tells us that they did not intend to *do* what the Church *does* when they *did* what the Church *does*. The Church teaches that we are to presume a sacrament is valid until it is *proven* that the lack of intention was present. When following this Catholic principle, there is no room for doubt. It is either proven that the intention *was not* there, or it is presumed valid.

The supposed deathbed confession doesn't prove anything about Liénart's intention in performing the sacraments. It doesn't even address the topic. To doubt Liénart's intention in performing any particular sacrament, based on this supposed deathbed confession, would be to render meaningless the Catholic principle of the presumption of intention and validity. Rather, this doubt could only be based on a principal of presuming intention, not until it's proven otherwise, but only until a person could imagine it to be otherwise - an entirely *new, non-Catholic* principle.

## Appendix B

### Syllogisms

The logic for why it must be presumed that Liénart intended to *do* what the Church *does* when performing the sacraments can be shown in two simple syllogisms, each under a different scenario with regard to the supposed evidence.

**Scenario 1:** The first-hand sources of all “evidence” of Liénart’s Masonry and deathbed confession are *anonymous*, making the supposed evidence equivalent to *hearsay*.

1. Intention to *do* what the Church *does* when performing the sacraments must be presumed until the contrary is proven.
2. Hearsay is not evidence, and cannot prove anything.
3. All supposed evidence of Liénart’s Masonry and deathbed confession is hearsay.
4. All supposed evidence of Liénart’s Masonry and deathbed confession is, therefore, not actual evidence, and cannot prove anything.
5. Therefore, proving that Liénart *did not* intend to do what the Church does cannot be done with any or all supposed evidence (hearsay) of Liénart’s Masonry and deathbed confession.
6. It must, therefore, be presumed that Liénart intended to *do* what the Church *does* in performing the sacraments.

**Scenario 2:** The first-hand sources of all “evidence” of Liénart’s Masonry and deathbed confession are verified to be true (this is hypothetical, as it has not occurred).

1. Intention to *do* what the Church *does* when performing the sacraments must be presumed until the contrary is proven (not speculated or conjectured).
2. Proving that a man did not intend to *do* what the Church *does* when performing a particular sacrament, or group of sacraments, would require evidence involving the explicit, unquestionable, testimony of that man stating that he *did not* intend to *do* what the Church *does* when performing a particular sacrament, or group of sacraments.
3. Proof that a man was part of an evil anti-Catholic organization, and wanted to destroy the Church, would not be evidence of an explicit, unquestionable, testimony that he *did not* intend to *do* what the Church *does* when performing a particular sacrament, or group of sacraments.
4. Liénart’s Masonic history and deathbed confession do not involve explicit, unquestionable, testimonies that he *did not* intend to *do* what the Church *does* when performing a particular sacrament, or group of sacraments.
5. Liénart’s Masonic history and deathbed confession *do not prove* that he *did not* intend to *do* what the Church *does* when performing a particular sacrament, or group of sacraments. Based on his Masonic history and deathbed confession, it would be speculation and conjecture to assert Liénart did not intend to *do* what the Church *does* when performing the sacraments.
6. It must, therefore, be presumed that Liénart intended to *do* what the Church *does* when performing the sacraments.

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